



New York State Assembly



New York City Council



Manhattan Borough President's Office

July 30, 2020

Lisette Camilo, Commissioner
Department of Citywide Administrative Services
1 Centre Street, 17th Floor New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Camilo,

Thank you for the continued effort by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) to support community input in regards to the future of 70 Mulberry Street located in Manhattan Community Board 3 ("MCB3").

In light of the demolition pause that was announced after floors 4 and 5 were taken down in accordance with the Department of Buildings' order, we request that DCAS immediately stabilize floors 1 through 3 and undertake a preservation assessment. The two engineering firms (the LiRo Group and Simpson Gumpertz & Heger Inc.) that DCAS engaged were only tasked with providing an independent structural analysis of 70 Mulberry Street. The firms presented their findings at the '70 Mulberry Street Town Hall' on June 25, 2020, confirming that floors 4 and 5 are structurally unsound and must come down for public safety reasons. We ask that DCAS additionally task these two firms to conduct a preservation assessment during the time period of the planned community engagement process to ensure that there are no delays to the site's recovery.

We are grateful that DCAS announced there will be a robust community engagement process to determine what the community would like to see at 70 Mulberry Street, and this is a perfect time to conduct the preservation assessment that many in the community are looking for. It is important that any future actions, whether they will be renovations or expansions of the building, prioritize and meet the needs of the building's displaced tenants -- the Chinatown Manpower Project (CMP), Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc., H.T. Chen & Dancers, Museum of Chinese in America, and United East Athletics Association -- as outlined in their May 26, 2020 statement to the public.

The June 25, 2020 ‘70 Mulberry Street Town Hall’ had over one hundred participants, and there appeared to be a strong support for a preservation study for elements of the historic structure that survived the January 23, 2020 fire. This sentiment was previously expressed by community members at the May 26, 2020 MCB3 Full Board meeting and the May 14, 2020 MCB3 Land Use Committee meeting, and is also shared by the displaced tenants.

A beloved cultural landmark in Chinatown, 70 Mulberry Street was previously home to P.S. 23. Generations of immigrants were educated in the facility before it was turned over to the current tenants who continue to provide arts, cultural, educational, and social service programs for the neighborhood. Built in 1891 by architect C.B.J Snyder, the building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, is one of the many early examples of urban school building design and construction in New York City, and is fondly remembered as “the heart of Chinatown”.

The preservation assessment of 70 Mulberry should include an analysis of which portions and elements of the building can be retained and the expected costs to do so. This study should also include information on salvageable stonework, window and doorway elements, and façade design, historic signage, and cast-iron columns, among other architectural components.

Design decisions for the rebuilt facility should be informed and guided by whichever existing elements are preserved. However, any future decisions regarding the preservation and conservation of the building’s elements should not impede the structural integrity of the building or the retrofits needed to bring the building up to code for fire safety and ADA requirements, among other needs. Conclusions from the preservation assessment should be provided to the community during the public engagement process and would better inform the community of all preservation options in the design of the site.

We look forward to working with you throughout the community engagement process to plan for the future design of the building in tandem with this independent preservation assessment in order to swiftly rehouse the displaced tenants who are patiently waiting to return to their spaces.

Thank you again for your continued engagement for the future of 70 Mulberry Street. We look forward to supporting a swift recovery of the site.

Sincerely,



Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President



Brian Kavanagh
State Senator



Yuh-Line Niou
State Assemblymember



Margaret Chin
Council Member, District 1

cc: Peg Breen, President, The New York Landmarks Conservancy
Sarah Carroll, Chair, Landmarks Preservation Commission
Richard Moses, President, Lower East Side Preservation Initiative
Alysha Lewis-Coleman, Chair, Community Board 3
H.T. Chen, H.T. Chen & Dancers
Hong Shing Lee, Chinatown Manpower Project
Wayne Ho, President, Chinese-American Planning Council
Nancy Yao Maasbach, Museum of Chinese in America
Echo Wong, United East Athletics Association